

WA Government to strengthen innovation in the state's agricultural industries

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While innovation in agriculture is crucial to capitalising on opportunities in the sector, a number of constraints remain in the way of farmers.

That's according to WA Minister for Agriculture and Food Ken Baston, who opened the WA Division of Ag Institute Australia (AIA) conference on innovation in agriculture in Perth last week.

Minister Baston told delegates those constraints include declining productivity growth from a changing climate and stagnating investment in grains research and development.

Organised by the WA Division of Ag Institute Australia (AIA), the conference attracted just on 100 enthusiastic participants, including students and professionals working in RD&E and agribusiness.

A panel of 10 strategically selected speakers, including farmers, researchers, advisers and administrators, teased out the issues arising from the conference topic *Innovation in Agriculture – Opportunities and Constraints*.

The minister also reiterated the WA Government's intention to streamline production of GM crops before the next election by repealing the Genetically Modified Crop Free Areas Act 2003.

"Repeal of the Act will not affect the licensing process for GM crops; once a crop is approved by the federal regulator there will be no additional impediment for WA growers", explained the minister.

A national approach to GM crop regulation is strongly supported by AIA, with the Minister's statement on WA being consistent with most other states' regulatory environments.

Queensland cotton grower and National Chair of AIA, David Hamilton, used his presentation to explain the huge production gains in cotton resulting from the rapid adoption of GM varieties since their introduction in 1996.

"Through genetic improvement and better husbandry, lint yields have steadily increased from around 2.5 bales/ha 40 years ago to around 10 bales/ha today - there has also been a 89 per cent reduction in use of pesticides and 40 per cent increase in irrigation water use efficiency.

With further innovation driven by on-going RD&E, the cotton productivity trajectory can be expected to continue its rising trend," David explained.

Other speakers explored issues surrounding the slowing down of Australia's productivity trajectory of the last two decades, including the decline in RD&E funding, especially from the public sector purse, lack of extension services and how that gap can be filled to improve technology adoption, and strengthening research outcomes through better collaboration.

Ag Institute Australia is the peak body representing agricultural science and natural resources management professionals across Australia.

The conference presentations can be accessed on the AIA website: www.aginstitute.com.au.

For further information please contact:

Dr Michael Robertson
Chair, Conference Organising Committee
Mob. 0417 721 510
Michael.Robertson@csiro.au

Mr David Hamilton
Chair, AIA
Mob. 0429 466 351
info@davidhamiltonconsulting.com.au

Editors note:

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